POPULATION AND HOUSING PATTERNS AMONG OLDER AMERICANS

Selected Statistical Tables Based on the 1990 Census of Population and Housing

April 1996

Naitonal Aging Information Center
7830 Old Georgetown Road, Suite 100
Bethesda, MD 20814-2434

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Introduction

This report presents 16 tables of statistical information on selected characteristics of the Nation's approximately 40 million Americans who are 60 years old or older. Their mobility, living arrangements, level of education, racial/ethnic origins, marital status, and income and poverty patterns are among the characteristics summarized in these tables. The data shown in the tables are based on the 1990 census. Specifically, they are drawn from special tabulations produced by the Bureau of the Census for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Aging. The special tabulations were produced under the 1990 Census of Population and Housing's Special Tabulation Program and were issued in March 1994.

Some background on the origins of the data will place the report in perspective. For the 1990 census, each housing unit in the country received one of two versions of the census questionnaire: either a short version containing baseline population and housing information (such as age, race/ethnicity, marital status, type of housing unit); or a long form containing those items on the short form plus additional questions (such as items related to primary language spoken in the home, other details about facilities in the home, income, and mobility). Thus, the entire population received the short-form items, while a sample of about one in six housing units received the additional items on the long form. All respondents were to fill out either the short form or the long form and return it to the Bureau of the Census. Some of the tables in this report reflect items from the long form, while other tables reflect baseline items.

Like all statistical data, users should be mindful of limitations in interpreting these data. The data in the tables represent the responses of a sample of all older Americans who were interviewed for the 1990 census. The data are estimates of the actual figures that would have been obtained from a complete count. Therefore, it is always possible that those sampled do not exactly mirror the actual population of older Americans. For example, some types of housing or households might have been under-covered or missed entirely by the overall census, and thus would also have been missing from the sample that was drawn from the census. Other sources of error are also inevitable, such as errors in reporting made by the respondent, recording errors made in interpreting handwriting, data processing errors, etc. Rigorous standards governing data collection and processing for the census ensure that such errors are minimized.

The tables in this report present national data on mobility, demographic characteristics, living arrangements, educational status, income and poverty patterns, and primary language spoken among the Nation's population age 60 and older. Data in most of the tables are presented as frequencies and percentage distributions across the aging population and broken down by age ranges. Tables showing income patterns present data in dollars and income ranges. From these tables a wealth of information can be gleaned. For example, a user might wish to combine two categories of age ranges, 65 to 74 plus 75 to 84, in order to summarize information for a large group of older Americans who are 65 to 84 years old and who might be considered to be of retirement age but not among the oldest of the elderly. Information about this group that might emerge from examining the tables include:

- Three out of four individuals age 65 to 84 live in households with a vehicle (a car, van, or truck) kept at home and available for their use.
- Two-thirds of those who are age 65 to 84 live in family households with at least one relative.
- Twenty-two million individuals age 65 to 84 (more than three-fourths of the population in that age group) have neither mobility nor self-care limitations, compared to 5 million in the same age group who do have mobility and/or self-care limitations.

Each table contains footnotes that define technical terms and help the reader interpret the data.